

## **How Do You Decide to Stripe a Road?**

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Paint markings on a road are more than just putting lines on the pavement. It is, in effect, installing a traffic regulating system.

Uniform traffic control is important so that drivers going from one jurisdiction to another are clear about what signs and markings mean. To get this uniformity, highway agencies follow national standards. These are in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices published by the Federal Highway Administration.

To decide when to stripe a road, traffic engineers look at three main factors:

- ✓ Is the road officially an arterial? Is it mainly used by through traffic, on a continuous route that is part of an arterial system?
- ✓ What is the amount of traffic on the road? Is the traffic mostly through traffic, which would have more need for striping and guidance?
- ✓ Is the road wide enough to safely have two or more lanes of traffic?

“No passing” zones are set when an engineering study shows that passing must be prohibited. This happens when drivers can’t see far enough because of curves or hills on the road. They are also often used when coming up to railroad crossings or bridges, or to obstacles that must be passed on the right.

Centerline stripes are used to separate traffic lanes that have opposite directions of travel. Edge stripes can be used to help show the edges of the road for more visibility. The national standards encourage edge lines on more heavily traveled rural arterials, as a visual guide during poor weather and visibility conditions. And Washington state laws encourage the use of edge lines on urban arterials to help separate the traffic lane from the shoulder area that pedestrians and bicyclists use.

Striping is also important to mark left and right turn lanes, two-way left turn lanes, and median areas. These lines help guide drivers into proper position on the road so that they can safely make their desired turn.

Lane lines are used to separate traffic lanes going the same direction. The white skip stripe allows lane changes with care, while a continuous solid white lane line is used where making a lane change is discouraged.

Not all roads need striping. Leaving them off local access roads and in residential areas with local traffic helps send a message to drive at a lower speed and with more caution.

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Questions about this article, or any of the series, or on other topics related to County Roads, may be directed either to your County Engineer, or to Al King, P.E., County Road Administration Board, Olympia, at [Al@CRAB.Wa.Gov](mailto:Al@CRAB.Wa.Gov).